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Using Data to Expand Programming on Campus: Data Driven Decision-Making and Institutional Collaboration in First-Year Only Courses at UNI

David Marcesani
University of Northern Iowa

Kristin Moser
University of Northern Iowa

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Using Data to Expand Programming on Campus: Data Driven Decision-Making and Institutional Collaboration in First-Year Only Courses at UNI

Part of the journal section “Forum: Cornerstone” [Contribution to Cornerstone: An Experiment in Interdisciplinarity and Community]

David Marcesani and Kristin Moser, “Using Data to Expand Programming on Campus: Data Driven Decision-Making and Institutional Collaboration in First-Year Only Courses at UNI”

Following UNI’s “Foundations of Excellence® (FoE) First Year” self-study, in partnership with the John Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education (John N. Gardner Institute, 2014), Cornerstone (UNIV 1000 and UNIV 1010), a first-year experience course, was established. Cornerstone is a year-long course that satisfies the writing and oral communication requirement within UNI’s Liberal Arts Core (LAC). Each Cornerstone section has, at minimum, one peer mentor embedded in the course. The First-Year Cornerstone course was piloted in fall 2010 with 9 First-Year Cornerstone sections and 11 peer mentors. This model then expanded to include “first-year only” (FYO) courses in the Liberal Arts Core (courses ranging from Math in Decision Making to Religions of the World). The FYO courses have promoted a collaborative environment with both faculty and staff, affording greater significance to the Liberal Arts Core and resulting in the formation of a cohort of First-Year Liberal Arts Core faculty.

Utilizing data related to academic performance, retention, and student satisfaction to support the growth of this model, the number of Cornerstone sections and LAC FYO sections has increased each year since the pilot course began. In the fall 2014 semester, there were 28 peer mentors, with 26 FYO courses in the Liberal Arts Core, supporting this first-year student success endeavor. The rapid growth of the first-year only offerings is due to the result of analyses that show that the FYO courses have a positive impact on students and faculty involved in the project. While the retention rate for first-year freshmen at UNI in non-FYO courses is 79.6%, the retention rate for students in the FYO courses is 85.6%. In addition, data collected from instructor and peer mentor assessments indicate a positive experience for everyone involved in the initiative. Along with the use of grade, GPA, and retention/persistence information to measure success in FYO courses, data is being used to measure impact on student success in Humanities courses based upon standardized test scores.

A new initiative being piloted and evaluated is the establishment of FYO sections of Liberal Arts Core Humanities courses (HUM 1021, HUM 1022 and HUM 1023), which include a linked supportive seminar to the course. Whereas Cornerstone focuses on new student transition and first-year issues, the supportive seminars (conducted by instructors from the Academic Learning

Center) provide academic skill development for the students who engage in this opportunity. Course grade, overall GPA and retention/persistence information is being evaluated for those students who participated in supportive seminars against those that did not. Also measured is the long-term success of students in linked sections of Humanities to seminars compared to those that were not.

Staffing, success, and sustainability are key issues of consideration when evaluating data and planning for the future of the FYO courses and enhancements to the Liberal Arts Core offerings. Furthermore, ideas of student success, long-term sustainability, and faculty development in first-year issues are central to the institutionalization of the FYO program and enhancement of the first-year curriculum. The Office of Institutional Research, the Liberal Arts Core Director, the Directors of Cornerstone, and the Office of Academic Advising have successfully collaborated to promote the growth and expansion of these endeavors. Future efforts will benefit from the utilization of such a collaborative model.

[Go to the narrative [Cornerstone: An Experiment in Interdisciplinarity and Community](#) article.]



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